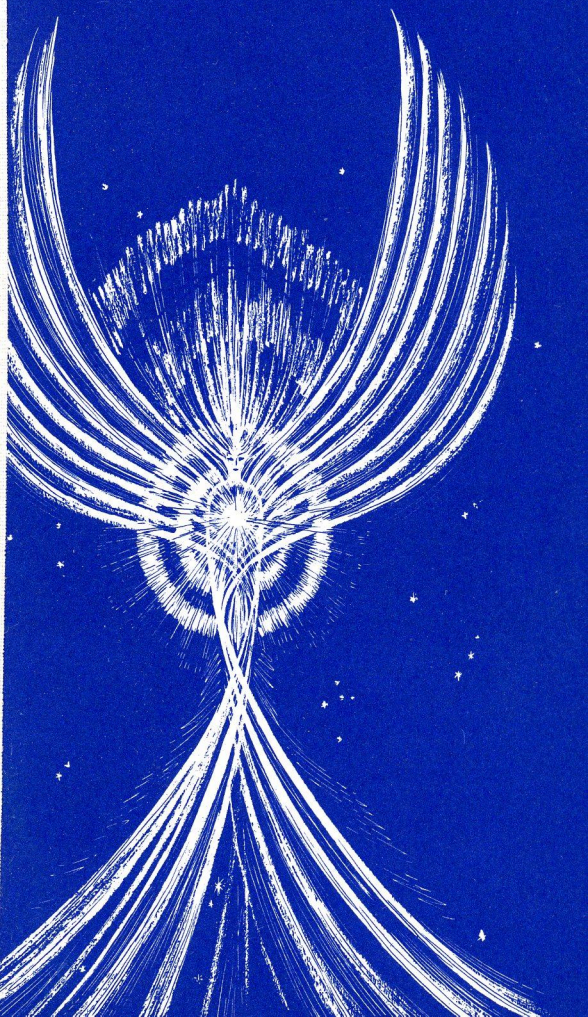
e CHRISTMAS of the ANGELS

DORA VAN GELDER



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TO students of the hidden side of life Christmas is a most wonderful reality—a far greater reality than most of us think since it involves the whole course of Nature, and not humanity only. With us Christmas is the Birthday of Our Lord, the anniversary of His physical Incarnation upon earth; and because of that we try to make it a time of peace and goodwill towards men, of very close unity and brotherly love. But have we ever wondered how such a unity is possible at Christmas, or why it is at this time of the year alone that men do really feel goodwill towards each other and think only of giving and not of taking? For the "Christmas spirit" is proverbial; and it is so widespread, so genuine and so real that we must look deeper for an explanation of it than can be found in the mere commemoration of the Nativity of the Christ, Whom so few today seem really to worship in their hearts.

Those who have awakened the inner vision know that there is a hidden side to Christmas which the ordinary man hardly suspects, although he reacts to its influence. We must remember that the whole earth is thronged with hosts of superphysical beings, Angels and Archangels and all the Company of Heaven, who stand for the most part at a higher level of evolution than ourselves and who are responsible for the guidance and control of the manifold processes of Nature. It is their thoughts and feelings and activities which play so important a part in the creation of that peculiar atmosphere of goodwill so noticeable at Christmas; and at this time of the year the whole earth thrills with the wonderful forces outpoured by the Angels and with the mighty Blessing of the Christ which descends in response to their adoration. All through the Advent Season, and indeed for many weeks before, preparation is made in the inner worlds in various ways for the celebration of the great Festival; the in-

fluences grow stronger and more intense as the days go by, till at length on Christmas Day the culmination is reached, the world opens its heart to the Lord as a flower opens its petals to the Sun, and a mighty flood of love and power is outpoured by the Christ Himself as the Incarnation upon earth of the Second Person of the Ever-Blessed Trinity.

But we must not imagine that it is any physical Birth that the Angels celebrate with such power and joy at Christmas. The Lord Christ is indeed their Lord and Teacher, as He is ours; but they regard Him not as a Man but as an Angel, and the details of His physical Life on earth belong rather to the human than to the Angelic conception of Him. Indeed the whole Angelic outlook upon life differs very considerably from the human. We generally look upon the Universe from the standpoint of form, think first of the form and only then of the life which energizes and ensouls it—that is the typically human point of view. And even when the inner vision is opened and sight of the invisible worlds is gained, the human observer still looks first at the form-side of those worlds, and only subsequently at the consciousness playing through the different forms. The Angel's point of view is exactly the opposite; he looks first at the life or consciousness, and then, only as a secondary consideration, at the form in which that life is enshrined—that is the typically Angelic point of view. If we look at a man, for example, we should look first at his physical body, then at his emotional, mental and causal bodies, seeing their different colors and striations, and judging his character and inner possibilities according to their delicacy and arrangement. But the Angel would regard the man from the standpoint of consciousness, would look to see how far God's Life was manifested in the man, how many forces were able to play through him; and only then would he look at the form of the higher bodies. This is a fundamental difference in outlook belonging to two separate lines of evolution.

The Angels' conception of Christmas is likewise very different from ours. We regard Christ-

mas as the commemoration of Christ's Birth as a Man, and it is for us very largely the observance of a Ceremony, of a form; even in the traditional Services of the Church the form-side of the Festival is predominant. But the Angels see Christmas from the life-side, as a turning-point of all the forces of Nature on every plane and at every level, as a time in which a direct and mighty outpouring of creative power and spiritual energy from God Himself takes place. Christmas in the Northern Hemisphere (from which all the great religions and civilizations of the world have sprung) occurs just after the shortest day in mid-winter, while in the Southern Hemisphere it is celebrated just after the longest day in midsummer; and thus throughout the whole world it marks a point of balance of deep significance in the hidden life of Nature. The change between the negative forces which bring about the cessation of creative life in winter, and the positive, dynamic energies which cause the earth to burst into blossom in the spring takes place at Christmas, and it is to initiate and make possible this tremendous change in polarity that the Christmas Festival is celebrated so joyously both in Heaven and earth. It is in very truth a Birth that is celebrated—not only the physical Birth of the Christ in Palestine, not only the symbolic birth of the Sun, but the far more splendid Birth of the Indwelling Christ in Nature, the yearly renewal and reawakening of creative Life, so gloriously to be consummated in the great Festival of Easter—the supreme triumph of Light over darkness, of Beauty over form. Because of the union of the Christ in the Heavens with the Christ incarnate both in Nature and in the heart of man, the Solar Symbolism—for the Sun is ever the symbol, and even in some mysterious way the very vehicle of the Christ Himself—has figured most prominently in all the great religions given by Christ the World-Teacher, the Sun of Righteousness; and these great Nature Festivals have been observed by man from age to age precisely because man is a part of Nature and shares her hidden life, whether he be aware of the fact or not.

Now the Angels are the active Agents of the Christ in Nature; they control and balance her mighty forces, direct her evolution in all its many aspects, and act as the channels and instruments of the Life and Energy of God throughout the whole of creation. The rhythmic changes of the seasons are indeed expressions of the Consciousness of God; but it is the Angelic Hierarchies who are His intermediaries and who are responsible for the bringing about of the changes in the lower worlds. Christmas, therefore, is a time of enormous activity in the Angelic Kingdom; the forces of that Kingdom are temporarily concentrated upon the great work of preparation for the influx of the new life, and all Angels, whether their work is primarily connected with Nature or not, lend their aid at this great Cosmic Festival. They give themselves to the service of the Christ by helping to bring about this inner Birth; they watch the changes with deepest interest and enthusiasm and throw all their power into the work—and very naturally they evolve by so doing. This ability to work in with Nature's processes is due to the fact that the Angels' consciousness is directed toward the life-side of evolution, and, therefore, that which has to do with the downpouring and outflowing of life to a great extent comes through them and is in their charge.

There is a very noticeable difference between the influences outpoured during the Christmas Festival in the Northern and in the Southern Hemispheres. For various reasons the Northern Hemisphere is the center of life on earth, contains the channels of those energies which shape the evolution both of Nature and of man; while the Southern Hemisphere has in the past in many ways been less creative, less vital in its natural forces—a fact which may to some extent account for the difference between Australian and European vegetation. There is a difference, too, in the Angels who direct the evolution of the two Hemispheres; and generally speaking we may say that the two halves of the earth's surface contain complementary characteristics, positive and negative, which,

united, form a perfect whole. While in the Northern Hemisphere it is a true Birth which takes place at Christmas, a Birth which corresponds very closely and beautifully with the birth of a little child, in the Southern Hemisphere it is rather a deepening of life which occurs, a further descent of the Life of the Christ into forms already prepared to receive it. The birth of a human child marks the first touch of the Soul with the little new-born body, and it is a time of much joy and beauty. But a deepening of life takes place when the child is about seven years old, and the Soul successively puts more and more of himself down into his new vehicle, until he assumes full control of it at manhood. This is a faint analogy of the difference between the Christmas of the Northern and the Christmas of the Southern Hemispheres. In the North joy and love and beauty are the predominant influences; in the South it is rather power and strength that is outpoured—a veritable deepening of the Life of Christ in Nature rather than His mystic Birth. The difference in influence is striking and most interesting to the student able to perceive it.

The great work of Angelic preparation for Christmas begins even before Advent, and gradually reaches its climax towards the end of December. It has two aspects, the one a working from below upwards, a manifestation of the power of that Creative Life of God Whom we call the Holy Ghost—a process of vivification of the forces of Nature, or reconstruction and of opening; the other an outpouring from above downwards, a veritable descent of God the Son —a process rather of inspiring and ensouling. The first aspect concerns the outpouring of tremendous energies from the center of the earth, that heart of the world in which the Holy Ghost is so especially manifest, the power radiating through the whole world, from center to circumference, and being distributed by the Hierarchies of Angels connected with the life and evolution of Nature—to be used by them in their work of preparation. These are the cleansing, the purifying, the creative forces which make the downpour of the new life possible, which

prepare the world to receive the Christ in its heart; and it is interesting to note that we in our Churches are instructed to draw upon those same great cleansing forces during the Advent Season. But the work of preparation does not only concern those Angels who are especially in charge of sections of the earth's surface, though they play a very large part in that work; it extends in many unexpected and interesting directions. Certain Orders of Angels take it as their especial work to concentrate their energies upon this aspect of the life of God, and to generate by the power of their thought forces which can be utilized by the Angels of Nature. Others work rather from the intuitional and emotional levels, and evoke enormous forces by their wonderful adoration, forces which are likewise employed in the general work of preparation. Yet others assist in the work by taking part in the Angelic Ceremonies which are held in Nature at this time, and the power outpoured through their Rituals is also used in the creative process outlined above. The very ceremonies of the Church which are celebrated during the Advent Season bear their share, and thus humanity likewise joins, even though unconsciously for the most part, in the mighty preparation for the Birth of the Christ in Nature. Such is the first aspect of the preparation, that aspect in which God the Holy Ghost is especially manifest.

The second aspect of the Angelic preparation concerns the Descent of God the Son, that mighty event which is the characteristic feature of the Christmas Festival. For just as the Descent of the Christ into Incarnation is the main purpose of the Eucharist; just as the whole work of building a Mystic Temple in the inner worlds, of the outpouring of power and love and devotion on the part of Angels and men, has no other object but the preparation of a channel for that Descent and for the reception and distribution of the forces then outpoured so freely by the Incarnate Lord; so the main purpose of the Christmas Festival is the Birth of the Christ in the world of Nature. That is the central point, the climax towards which all the long preparation has been leading. And

that Descent is a very real and a very wonderful fact; for just as at Allhallowtide the inner worlds are in especially close relation with the outer world, and thus intercommunion between them is far easier than at other seasons of the year, so at Christmas the Christ Himself is especially close to all His creatures, is far nearer than at other times both to Angels and to men. It is as though a fuller degree of power became manifest through the Person of Our Lord the Christ, from that Other Aspect of Himself Which is Very God of Very God, as though the Hidden Light shone yet brighter through Him Who is the Light. These things are sacred and hard for us to understand; but at least we may say that at Christmas the Angels and indeed the whole Hierarchy of Nature draw especially close to Our Lord, and realize Him with deepest adoration as a definite and wonderful Personality, as the Incarnation of God Himself upon earth. And His Life descends into Nature in ways that we can scarcely grasp, so that the whole world is filled with His mighty Benediction, thrills to the vibrations of His Love and Peace. That is why Christmas is always said to represent the First Great Initiation, the Birth of the Christ in man; for the Descent of the Christ into Nature is mirrored in the descent of the personal Christ, the Hidden Light in man, into our own hearts, Who is likewise a manifestation of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. The same aspect of the Divine Life is manifested in Nature at Christmas, in Man at Initiation, and in the Host at every Celebration of the Holy Eucharist; and thus at Christmas it may be said that the whole world is initiated anew each year, ascends each year into richer levels of consciousness never before reached. Truly the mighty power of God made manifest at Christmas is drawn from Heaven above and from Earth beneath, and the whole wide world rejoices at the wealth of love and joy outpoured so freely during this wondrous season.

It is in connection with this second aspect of the preparation that the most marvelous features of Christmas are revealed. All during the weeks

of Advent, but especially just before Christmas itself, the whole Angelic Kingdom pours out the very fullness of its love and adoration at the Feet of Our Lord the Christ, the Incarnate Lord of Love; and the mighty response which descends from Him is likewise poured down upon Nature, giving it power from a new source, from a fresh aspect of the Divine Life. This wonderful adoration reaches its climax upon Christmas Night, when the whole earth pulses and thrills with the waves of adoration ascending to the Lord from His countless hosts of Angels throughout the world, waves which flood the earth with delicate rose and heliotrope. And in response the Lord's Power pours down in a marvelous Benediction of peace and love.

Can we wonder that with all this hidden adoration and Blessing the "Christmas spirit" should be abroad in the world, and that men should feel kindly disposed towards each other and towards God? For the Angels help man as far as he can be helped, intensify all his highest aspirations, stir up his adoration and his love, and so give effect to the ancient and beautiful words of their traditional Hymn: "Glory be to God in the highest, on earth peace to men of goodwill." And yet even this is not all; for the Mystic Birth is celebrated not only in color but in sound also, and the great Angels of Music have their wondrous part to play in the Christmas Festival, lending a still greater enchantment to its celebration in the inner worlds. But their celestial music no longer resembles that of harps and violins, but rather the chiming of myriads of sweet-toned silver bells. Each Angel is, as it were, a bell; each bell a note in the mighty harmony. The chiming of the Christmas bells may be heard all through Advent, but on Christmas Night and throughout the following Day the Angels gather round the Lord in all their hosts; the whole Angelic choir is united into one glorious chant, and the swelling music of the bells peals forth in a single Hymn of worship to the Lord of Love. That music draws all living things together, harmonizes and attunes the whole world, floods it with divine beauty, beauty which is

reflected in the beauties of woods and mountains, of lakes and trees and flowers, and all the lovely things of earth.

Such is the Festival of Christmas in the inner worlds—a time of wonderful power and realization for both Angels and men, a time of close communion with our Lord the Christ. If we would cooperate with the Angels in their work, we must fully realize the "Christmas spirit" for ourselves, put aside all selfish and self-centered thought and throw ourselves heart and soul into the service of others. The keynote of the season is adoration and love, adoration to the Christ and love to our brother-men in whom He is veiled. One practice will be of assistance to those who wish to realize the Christmas spirit more deeply, and that is the endeavor to blend their consciousness with Nature, to try by looking at some beautiful scene from the life-side to see it as the Angels see it, to realize something of the hidden forces which shape it and make it beautiful, and to draw those forces into themselves. Thus we may experience that sense of unity and love and joy which so especially characterizes the Christmas season, and so open ourselves to be channels for the forces outpoured. Above all there must be perfect harmony between ourselves and others, if we would celebrate Christmas aright; for that is a necessary condition if the Christmas forces are to flow through us. For Christ reigns in the heart of every man, and in serving our brothers we serve the Lord of Love Himself, directly and personally. As He Himself said long ago: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."